

Life Home&Garden

Hellebores spruce up shade yard with vivid winter color

Eighteen years ago, Cheryl Turner decided to spruce up her yard. Specifically an East-facing backyard with trees.

"I began researching shade garden plants and fell in love with Hellebores," she said. "They bloom when nothing else is blooming, and brighten up a winter garden."



Kathy Van Mullekom
Diggin' In

Hellebores are forgiving plants, said Turner, who gardens in Newport News.

Once established, they require minimum maintenance — just trim back the earlier year's growth so the new blooms can emerge and be seen and enjoyed.

The best tip, she said, is to make sure the plants are watered regularly when they are first planted. Then sit back and enjoy the annual show, which often begins with early bloomers such as Jacob in December. In Hampton Roads, Hellebores typically bloom through April, depending on the weather.

The genus *Helleborus* includes several cultivars, the most common being *Helleborus orientalis*, nicknamed Lenten rose.

Hellebores are cold-hardy



PHOTO COURTESY THE GARDENER'S WORKSHOP

A Hellebores garden grows under a tree at Lisa Ziegler's flower farm in Newport News.

beauties for several reasons — deer and voles do not like them. They tend to dislike being transplanted, so place them where you want them and leave them be.

They also give you dozens — sometimes more — of new plants because they reseed and spread.

"Hellebores is the most fabulous dry shade ground cover — ever," said Liza Ziegler of The Gardener's Workshop, an online gardening center based in Newport News. Her fields are a cut-flower farm that provides bou-

quets to local florists and specialty food stores.

"Planted at the base of large trees that suck the life out of others, Hellebores seem to shine. They are evergreens that bloom in winter, last till June or so and deer don't eat them — what's not to love?"

When planted in organic-rich soil in the fall, the plants need little care, Ziegler said. Planted in early spring, they need supplemental watering to get established.

"We mulch, but not too deeply to allow the seeds that drop to have contact with the soil to germinate into a plant," she said.

"We might spread some compost as mulch every couple of years and top with a thin layer of leaves. No fertilizers needed.

"It takes up to two years to get a 6-inch plant, which makes them pricey. It takes time to grow them into the half-gallon pot that you purchase for \$20."

Ziegler said her entire Hellebores collection, which num-

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bers in the dozens, started with three plants she bought in 1991.

"Most folks cut them too early to have a long-lasting cut flower," she said.

"Once they have bloomed and the heads that initially are facing the ground lift upward, the color changes to green and the seed pods have developed in the center we harvest for cut flowers.

"We cut the stem at ground level and place it in fresh cut-flower food," she said, describing the process. "They last two to four weeks in the vase at this stage."

"Our bed is usually in full bloom when our farm is on the Hampton-Newport News Historic Garden Week Tour, which is April 24 this year."

Learn more about Ziegler's garden shop and flower farm at www.shoptgw.com or call 877-7159.

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